

This I Call to Mind

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[0 : 00] In Lamentations chapter 1, you may recall that the city of Jerusalem was personified as a woman.

She is a widow. She is a betrayed lover. She is an abandoned wife.

She is a promiscuous woman. She is a humiliated princess. In chapter 3 of Lamentations, we find that it is written from the perspective of a male.

Likely authored by Jeremiah, although that seems not the point, not to be the point, because it's anonymous. And this then allows us to see this male voice as a representative for all people in all times, in any location, who suffer.

This is not just a record of suffering experienced in Jerusalem. Lamentations 3 is a description of experiences of any sufferer who feels like God has turned against them, and who feels like their grief and pain are more than they can bear.

[1 : 36] Do you remember the man from the land of Uz, whose name was Job? That's how the book of Job begins.

Job thought that God had turned against him. He thought that his pain was more intense, and his grief was more than he could bear.

What's interesting about the book of Job is that Job was righteous. Not sinless, but blameless. He had a right relationship with God, and we know that right from the very beginning.

We know that his suffering is not the result of his sin. Job doesn't know that, but we the readers know that. Lamentations is not like the book of Job.

It is not a poem about the suffering of the righteous. Lamentations is a series of poems about the suffering of the guilty.

[2 : 48] But Lamentations is like Job. Think about it in these ways. The poet, like Job, struggles to make sense of a horrific tragedy that has befallen them.

He and Job both understand that blessing and suffering both come from the hand of Almighty God. Both the poet and Job understand that sin is the source of brokenness in this world.

Both the poet and Job cry out to God in their grief, to a God who refuses to respond to them. Both struggle to cling to their faith when God's ways seem cruel.

Have you ever wandered through grief? Maybe you are wandering through some grief right now. Lamentations 3 is for you. Do you recall Psalm 23? Psalm 23.

[4 : 35] Notice how, as Lamentations 3 opens, this beautiful psalm is turned upside down.

Lamentations 3, verse 1. I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath.

The shepherd is not leading me. He has driven and brought me into darkness without any light.

Surely, against me, he turns his hand again and again the whole day long. What would that mean if someone is taking their hand and turning it against you the whole day long?

He feels beaten up by God. He recognizes that it is God, not the Babylonians who are responsible for his suffering.

[5 : 53] Do you see that in the text? He has. He has. He has. Again and again. He understands where this suffering is coming from. Verse 4.

He has made my flesh and my skin waste away. He has broken my bones. He has besieged and enveloped me.

There's nowhere that I can turn. I'm blocked in. With what? With bitterness and tribulation. He has made me dwell in darkness like the dead of long ago.

He has made me dwell in darkness like the dead of long ago. He has walled me about so that I cannot escape like a prisoner. He has made my chains heavy.

Though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer. He has blocked my ways with blocks of stones.

[7 : 02] He has made my paths crooked. He has made my paths crooked. He is a bear lying in wait for me.

A lion in hiding. What is the shepherd supposed to do? The shepherd protects the sheep from the lion and the bear.

And now here, the shepherd has turned into the lion and the bear, coming against the sheep. He turned aside my steps, verse 11. And tore me to pieces.

He has made me desolate. He bent his bow. And he set me as the target for his arrow.

[8 : 04] He drove into my kidneys the arrow of his quiver. He feels attacked by God. Mortally wounded by God.

My God. I have become the laughing stock of all people's shame.

The object of their taunts all day long. He has filled me with bitterness. In other words, he has force fed me poison.

He has sated. That's satisfied. He's filled my stomach. I was hungry, and now I am sated.

But not with good food. With wormwood. With what would do me harm. With what would poison me. He has made my teeth, verse 16, grind on gravel.

[9 : 06] And made me cower in ashes. My soul is bereft of peace. There is no, the word is, shalom.

There is no wholeness. There is no health. I have been deprived of all goodness. I have forgotten what happiness is.

And so I say, verse 18. My endurance has perished. I can't take this anymore. I can't go on.

There is no future for me. My endurance has perished. And so has my hope from the Lord.

I was talking this week with a good friend.

[10 : 13] And we were talking about anniversaries. And I was asked by this friend about why these anniversaries?

Why do I keep them on my calendar? Why don't I just take them off of my calendar so that I don't remember them anymore? And so then I can just sort of forget about those awful days.

I don't know the real answer to that. I'm wrestling with that. But I think part of the answer is in this next verse.

It's not that I want to dwell on the past. But I don't want to forget it either. I want someone to remember those awful days.

Verse 18. Sorry, verse 19. Remember my affliction and my wanderings.

[11 : 20] The wormwood and the gall. Why? Why does he want God to remember it? Because verse 20.

My soul continually remembers it. Do you see that? And is bowed down within me.

Lord, please remember these days. Because I can't forget them. That's the idea here. God has turned against his people.

Their suffering is intense. It is personal. It is overwhelming. It feels like more than they can bear.

This man who is intended to represent all sufferers anywhere at any time.

Is at the bottom. He is so low, end of verse 20, that even his soul is bowed down. It's not just that his body has been physically broken down.

[12 : 40] He feels like his soul, the depths of who he is, is lying flat on the ground. He is at the bottom. Have you been there?

And then right at this breaking point. Right when we look at this character and we say, this person can't take one more thing.

He can't take one more thing. There is not one more ounce of suffering that you could put on that person. He is so low, so broken, bereft of peace, no health, no goodness.

His soul has been bowed down. He wants to forget the bad days, but he can't. And so he desperately wants God to remember them. He's forgotten what all happiness is.

He can't take anything else. Right there, in that moment. A thought pierces his mind.

[13 : 49] At this place where he can't take anything else. And he doesn't even know if he wants to go on because he has no hope, no future.

Even with God, he believes. A thought pierces his mind. But it is not an answer to the question of why suffering and evil persists in this world.

The thought that pierces his mind is not the promise of better circumstances. The thought that pierces his mind at the bottom is not a prediction of a brighter, more hopeful future. No, the thought that pierces his mind is a thought about God. He has hit rock bottom, and yet all hope is not lost.

Why? Why? Verse 22. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.

[15:02] His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Not brand new, like you got some new mercy this morning.

Renewed. Auto-renewed. Like the subscription that you think you don't want. But the best kind of subscription. Because it just keeps auto-renewing every day.

Day by day by day by day. Fresh, auto-renewed mercies for you. Great is your faithfulness.

It is infinite. It is unending. All hope is not lost. All hope is not lost. Verse 24. The Lord is my portion, says my soul. Therefore, I will hope in him.

Why should we hope in him? Well, all hope is not lost. Because the Lord is good.

[16:04] Verse 25. The Lord is good. The Lord is tov. To those who wait for him. To the soul who seeks him.

It is good. It is tov. That one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.

Since the Lord is good, then we can patiently endure suffering. Why? Because we remember that our suffering won't last forever.

Verse 28. Let him sit alone in silence when it is laid on him. When suffering comes his way. When he has to endure affliction and hardship.

Let him sit alone in silence when it is laid on him. That seems hard, doesn't it? But verse 29. Let him put his mouth in the dust.

[17:07] There may yet be hope. Let there be repentance. Let there be genuine grief. That seems harder, doesn't it?

Verse 27. Sorry, verse 30. Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes. And let him be filled with insults.

That seems like the hardest yet, doesn't it? Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes. Let him give his hope.

Let him give his hope. Let him give his hope. We can patiently endure suffering by remembering that suffering won't last forever.

Verse 31. For the Lord will not cast off forever. But though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

[18:14] For he, verse 33, for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men.

What an interesting statement. The Lord does not afflict from his heart.

Think about this statement for a moment. The poet who represents all sufferers at all time in any place, he refuses to see his suffering as the result of chance or bad luck or happenstance or fate. He refuses to see that. He recognizes that the suffering that he is experiencing is coming from the hand of God. He, he is the one who is afflicting him.

God is behind their affliction. He affirms that. And yet he simultaneously denies that that affliction comes from God's heart.

[19:27] God's holiness demands a response towards sin.

But God's deepest delight is showing mercy. Dane Ortlund says it like this.

The one who rules and ordained all things brings affliction into our lives with a certain divine reluctance.

He is not reluctant about the ultimate good that is going to be brought about through that pain. That indeed is why he is doing it for some ultimate good.

But something recoils in him in sending that affliction. The pain itself does not represent his heart.

[20:33] All hope is not lost. Why?

Because the Lord does not delight in afflicting. And the Lord is just. Verse 34. To crush underfoot all the prisoners of the earth.

To deny a man justice in the presence of the Most High. To subvert a man in his lawsuit. All three of these things. They are undoing of justice.

They are injustices. To do these things. Verse 36. The Lord does not approve. Why not? Because the Lord is just. Just doesn't mean that he is fair.

This is what we think about when we think about justice. We think about what is fair. That is not what it means that God is just. God is just means that he always does what is right.

[21 : 36] It may not feel fair to you at all. And yet it may still very well be what is right. That's what it means when it says God is just.

All hope is not lost. Because the Lord is sovereign over good and bad. Look at verse 37. Who has spoken?

And it came to pass unless the Lord commanded it. Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come? Why should a living man complain?

A man about the punishment of his sins. This thought that pierces his mind when he is at the very bottom and hopeless.

Is a thought about who God is. And having these truths about the Lord fresh on his mind.

[22 : 40] He urges his readers to repent. Verse 40. Let us test and examine our ways. And return to the Lord.

Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven. We have transgressed and rebelled. And you have not forgiven.

Why not? No repentance. No repentance. Do you remember the cloud that led God's people out of Egypt?

And the cloud that protected them as they crossed the Red Sea? And the cloud that ultimately led them into the promised land? And then the cloud that filled the tabernacle so that they knew the presence of God was with them?

Look what happens here with that as the prophet alludes to the cloud and draws some metaphors to the cloud. But notice how this cloud picture is again turned upside down for us.

[23 : 48] Verse 43. You have wrapped yourself with anger.

And pursued us. Killing without pity. You have wrapped yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can pass through.

You have made us scum and garbage among the peoples. All our enemies open their mouths against us. Panic and pitfall have come upon us.

Devastation and destruction. Rather than protecting them, God pursues them. Hunts them like a wild animal hunts his sheep.

Attacks them like a warrior attacks his enemy. Rather than sheltering his people with this cloud, the cloud is now protecting God from the people.

[24 : 51] And the way that God revealed himself to them has now become the way that God has concealed himself from them.

The cloud that signaled God's presence with his people is now a barrier that prayers to God cannot pass through.

It's not surprising that what feels like an unbridgeable gap between himself and his people. This feels unbridgeable.

If God has wrapped himself in a cloud and not even prayer can get through to him, what are we going to do? What are we going to do if God is not listening to our prayers?

Well, it leads him to wandering in more grief. Verse 48. My eyes flow with rivers of tears.

[25 : 54] What a compelling metaphor. Rivers of tears. Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.

My eyes will flow without ceasing. Without respite. Without rest. Without a break. Until the Lord from heaven looks down and sees.

My eyes cause me grief at the fate of all the daughters of my city. I have been hunted like a bird by those who were my enemies without cause.

They flung me alive into the pit and cast stones on me. Water closed over my head. His circumstances have not improved.

People are still taunting him. He's still feeling shame. Tears are still flowing. The Lord still feels distant and unreachable.

[26 : 58] His enemies are still calloused and treating him as worthless. As though he can just be thrown away. Buried alive. God still seems against him.

The grief and pain are more than he can bear. So much so. That he is wandering in grief.

Thinking again. All hope is lost. I am like a dead person. And then as before.

Wandering through grief. He clings to belief. He clings to belief. Verse 55. I called on your name, O Lord.

From the depths of the pit. You heard my plea. Do not close your ear to my cry for help.

[28 : 01] You came near when I called on you. You said, do not fear. You have taken up my cause, O Lord.

You have redeemed my life. You have seen the wrong done to me, O Lord. Judge my cause. You have seen all their vengeance and all their plots against me.

You have heard their taunts, O Lord. All their plots against me. The lips and thoughts of my assailants are against me all the day long.

Behold, they're sitting and they're rising. I am the object of their taunts. Do you see what has happened again? We went from the beginning of the chapter where it is.

He has, he has, he has, he has all of the ways that God has afflicted him. To again, clinging to belief. You have heard me. You have remembered.

[29 : 00] You haven't forgotten those awful days. He's still wandering through horrible grief.

But he has turned his attention towards God. He doesn't seek vengeance on his enemies.

He doesn't plot revenge against those who abuse him. He gives all of the wrong done to him to God. And he trusts God to do what is right.

Verse 64. You will repay them, O Lord, according to the work of their hands. You will give them dullness of heart.

Your curse will be on them. You will pursue them in anger and destroy them from under your heavens, O Lord.

[29 : 54] Have you heard the statement? All who wander are not lost.

This is from a poem in J.R.R. Tolkien's book, *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

And this is a poem that describes a character named Strider. And he is wandering. He is a wanderer.

He is not where he wants to be. He is not where he needs to be. And yet, he is not lost. When the poet of *Lamentations 3* is in the depths of the pit, at his lowest point of wandering in grief, he clings to belief.

He believes that God hears him when he cries. He recognizes the Lord's presence is still with him. And he cries out, verse number 57, sorry, verse number 54, I am lost.

[31 : 15] I am lost. Do not fear.

I am lost. Do not fear. All who wander are not lost.

So let me ask you, where are you in your wandering through grief? Maybe you are just beginning to grieve.

The loss of a relationship, loss of a career opportunity, loss of finances, unexpected changes in your plans. Maybe you are neck deep in your grief.

A loved one has died. Your dream turned into a nightmare. You feel surrounded by people who talk about you, but won't talk to you.

[32 : 37] Maybe you feel all kinds of physical pain that no one else knows about. Maybe you recently received a life-altering medical diagnosis.

Maybe you have guilt, deep guilt, unconfessed sin. Maybe you feel betrayed or abandoned. Maybe you are neck deep in that kind of grief.

Maybe you are walking right at the edge of grief, like a person who walks out of some deep water, and as they walk, it gets shallower and shallower and shallower and shallower, and you're kind of walking along the edges of your grief.

But you know that you'll be back. I don't think we ever find our way out of grief on this side of Jesus' return.

I'm not suggesting that we should be sour, mopey people, people who can't smile, people who can't have a good time, people who can't be cheerful, people who refuse to be joyful.

[33 : 52] That's not the kind of people that we should be. The fruit of the Spirit is joy. But joy is produced in spite of wandering in our grief, not because we have somehow found our way out of our grief.

We need the Holy Spirit's help in producing joy because we are wandering in grief.

Until Jesus brings an end to our grief, I'm convinced we're going to wander around in it. Sometimes, perhaps, near the edges, wading, wading at the edge of the water, wading, W-A-D-I-N-G, at the

edge of the waters of grief.

And sometimes we will find ourselves neck deep in it. Perhaps treading water for a while, and perhaps sinking underneath it.

Sometimes less, sometimes more, sometimes able and ready to help others in their grief, and sometimes desperately needing others to help us in our grief.

[35 : 20] We wander, but safe in Jesus. We are not lost. Are you safe in Jesus?

Is Jesus your Savior? Or are you wandering through the grief, the hopelessness of this life, apart from Jesus?

Come to Jesus. Believe in Jesus. He is your source of hope that you are looking for, that your neighbors are looking for, that your co-workers are looking for, and may not even realize it yet.

Come to Jesus. Lament dares us to hope. Lament dares to hope.

Lament dares to hope, even when life is hard. Lament dares to hope, even when you say, I can't take it anymore. I can't go on.

[36 : 37] There is no good outcome here for me. Some days I can't even remember what it's like to feel joy. God seems distant. His promises seem irrelevant.

It's going to get worse before it gets better. I just know that it is. You may be right. Hope does not arise from better circumstances.

Hope arises from burned out ashes. Hope arises from broken down ruins. Hope arises in the middle of unbearable pain.

Hope arises in the filthiness of shame. Hope arises from the depths of depression. Hope arises from the darkness of death.

Hope arises with the faintest glimmer of belief. With the smallest seed of faith. Hope arises when, by the Holy Spirit's power, you cling to what you believe about God.

[37 : 43] The Lord's steadfast love cannot end. His mercies auto-renew.

The Lord is good. The Lord's compassion will outlast my suffering. The Lord does not delight in afflicting me. We need to remember that.

The Lord is just. The Lord is sovereign over all good and all bad. Wander through your grief, clinging to belief.

Choose by God's sufficient grace to make what you believe about God greater than what you see. Greater than what you feel in the moment. More meaningful than the pain that you are feeling. More real than the hurts that are very real.

[38 : 49] You, dear child of God, will never wake up to a day devoid of God's mercy.

You will never exhaust His steadfast love. Wherever you are, in your wandering through your grief, keep wandering and keep clinging to belief.

The Lord is with you. God is there. And He is for you. In Christ. Let's pray.

Good Father, we are grateful for Your Word. Grateful for the privilege of receiving it. Please help us as we take this Word in and as we wrestle with the things that we have heard, as we think about them, as we meditate on them, as we reflect on what Your Word says to us about those who wander.

Please give us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, strength to continue wandering. and please give us all the sufficient grace that we need to cling to belief.

[40 : 23] That You are there with us in our grief. And that You are for us in our Savior, Jesus.

Father, would You please give us courage and make us sensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts as we take a few moments to be quiet before You and prepare our hearts to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

Father, would You and prepare our hearts for us for us to be quiet for us perhaps there are ways that we need to confess we have stopped our wandering and we have landed on some deep depression and we need to be called back to faith.

perhaps there are people around us that we know are suffering and we have held back from our care for them. Perhaps we are wading in the shallow waters of grief and we're not mindful of the ways that You are working right now in our hearts.

Would You please, blessed Holy Spirit, do business with our hearts right now and help us to confess and to believe and to receive forgiveness.

[42 : 03] Father, we confess one final time that the steadfast love that You have for Your people never ceases. And it is because of Your steadfast love that we are not consumed.

Your mercies towards us are new every morning and we confess that we need that kind of auto-renewed mercy. Please help us.
As we seek to follow You as we desire to trust and obey, make us more like Jesus. Keep us faithful.
It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.